

[Omitted here is discussion unrelated to Seaborg's visit to the White House.]

From 3:40 to 4:15 p.m. I had my first appointment with President Nixon with Lee A. DuBridge, Henry A. Kissinger, Robert F. Ellsworth, and H. R. Haldeman present. The President handed me a letter asking me to stay on as the Chairman

of the Atomic Energy Commission. We discussed the TROLL study, the AEC peaceful uses of atomic energy program, the problem of high yield underground nuclear testing, and the shutdown of two reactors at Hanford.

The President asked us to enter his office before his preceding appointment had ended, consisting of a group which included Senator Scoop Jackson, Henry Kissinger, General Andrew Goodpaster, and Bryce Harlow. The President introduced us to these people, and as Senator Jackson was leaving, asked him in a semi-joking way what his recommendation on the SST would be. Jackson replied lightly that he had sort of a conflict of interest there and didn't reply directly, but the President reiterated his interest in the SST.

We sat down on the two couches facing each other, in front of the fireplace which had a crackling fire. I sat on the couch next to the President, while DuBridge, Ellsworth and Kissinger sat on the opposite couch, and Haldeman sat on a chair in between the couches.

The President began by handing me a letter, with an accompanying envelope, saying it was self-explanatory. (This was the letter asking me to stay on as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.) He jokingly said it was a close decision, but that he had the final say.

I began by saying I had a very sensitive matter to discuss with the President and then went on to describe the TROLL study. I discussed its implications, which the President clearly understood, and cautioned all present to treat the information in the highest confidence, which all agreed to do. I said I was asking three people in the Livermore Laboratory to check the conclusions of this study, and that I would let the President know these results when they were forthcoming.

The President then raised the question of Plowshare in the peaceful uses of nuclear explosives and said that this is a subject in which he is very interested. He said he wants this to have a high priority in his Administration; in fact, he said he has a special prejudice for this program--the way all people have special quirks and prejudices--and hopes it can go forward expeditiously. He said he has heard of the Australian project and asked whether I could describe this to him.

The President had a two-page memorandum before him, which he glanced at occasionally as we spoke. (I wouldn't be surprised if this might not have been a memorandum written by Ellsworth covering the conversation I had with Ellsworth, Whitehead and Hofgren last Wednesday, January 22nd.)

I described the project proposed for Keraudren Bay in Northwest Australia, including the fact that it would consist of five nuclear explosives buried a couple hundred feet below the ocean bottom in that region. The purpose would be to build a narrow harbor for ships to enter to receive iron ore from the interior for transport to other ports.

The President asked what would be required to get on with this project, and I said that two things would be required: (1) we would need additional funding for this and related aspects of the Plowshare program, and (2) we would need to adopt a more realistic interpretation of the test ban treaty from the standpoint of radioactive debris than had been adopted in the previous Administration by the State Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. The interpretation adopted by the previous Administration had been that any amount of radioactivity, no matter how small, might be a violation of the test ban treaty if it were detectable beyond the borders of the country where the

excavation experiment had been performed. I said I had disputed this interpretation, which I referred to as absurd, rather continuously during the last four or five years. I said that I had advocated a more sensible or de minimis interpretation that had something to do with reality and levels that might have some meaning from a health standpoint. I said there were international committees that set standards from the health standpoint which, if we adhered to, would make it possible to carry out the Plowshare program, including the Australian experiment.

I also mentioned that when I testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (testimony which was critical to the ratification of the test ban treaty from the standpoint of a number of Senators like Scoop Jackson and Clint Anderson), I indicated it would be possible to carry out excavation experiments, having in mind a reasonable interpretation and not the atom-by-atom interpretation. I also mentioned that there was a great deal of interest in other countries in Plowshare and, in fact, we promise in article 5 of the Nonproliferation Treaty that we will make Plowshare services available to them; if we had not agreed to do this, there would be a number of countries that would not be interested in adhering to the NPT.

I indicated that the Soviets, without announcing it as policy in so many words, are conducting a program which is more consistent with such a realistic interpretation of the test ban treaty. They had conducted at least ten underground weapons tests or excavation experiments, and possibly as many as 15, 20 or 25, in which debris was readily detectable outside their borders. Apparently the Soviets do not take the trouble to bury their underground shots as deeply or as carefully as we do.

The President said he was interested in the entire Plowshare program and wanted to know what the prospects were for using the Isthmus of Panama. I indicated that the prospects were good. I pointed out that there is an Inter-Oceanic Canal Study Commission, headed by Robert Anderson (Milton Eisenhower and Kenneth Fields are also members), that was studying this with the view of coming up with a recommendation before December, 1970, as to the best method for building such a canal, nuclear or conventional. I said that the Australian experiment would be one step among the many that would be required in order to obtain the information within the time frame required by the Inter-Oceanic Canal Study Commission. I said that it was only within the last year that we had succeeded in getting approval for three important Plowshare excavation experiments, and that these, together with the Australian experiment--or its equivalent--as well as some others, would be needed in order to get the information that the Commission required.

I pointed out that, due to the need for the harbor in Australia, it would be necessary to complete the experiment by 1970. The President asked whether it could be done sooner, and I said it probably could, provided funding and approvals were given in quick order. The President asked that I send him as soon as possible a memorandum indicating the additional funding that would be required for the Plowshare program, including the Australian experiment. The memorandum should contain a description of the Australian experiment and the Plowshare program as related to the Inter-Oceanic Canal Study Commission, including the problems concerning the interpretation of the test ban treaty and our suggestion of how to overcome these.

The President reiterated his interest in the peaceful uses of atomic energy and said he thought this was something that should be accelerated. As he was speaking in broad terms beyond the Plowshare aspect, I asked whether he had in mind power reactor development, and especially breeder development, and he said

he did. He thus expanded his request for information on the peaceful uses of atomic energy on a rather broader scale than just the Plowshare program.

The President said he would like to set up some kind of a briefing session in which he and others might be briefed on the peaceful uses of atomic energy. He recalled in this connection the talk I had given at the Bohemian Grove at the breakfast which he attended (this was the talk at the Owls Nest in July, 1967) and how impressed he was by my description of the great potential in this field. I immediately suggested that he come to our Headquarters in Germantown and meet some of the key staff and be briefed on our program. He said he would like to do this and that the briefing might cover the weapons and national security aspects as well as the peaceful uses aspects of atomic energy. At first he said he might come out in about two months, but then as the conversation continued, he suggested it might be March. When I hinted it might be useful to come even earlier, he said he could possibly do it in February. He asked Haldeman to include the Atomic Energy Commission among the departments and agencies that he was scheduling for visits. He also suggested to Haldeman that Secretary of State Rogers should be included in the briefing at Germantown.

I then said there was another area that I would like to call to his attention, and that was underground testing of high yield weapons. He immediately recognized this as a problem area and glanced at his memorandum, which appeared to treat this subject as well. I described the problem briefly, indicating that I thought the AEC had the safety considerations well in hand. I said we have adopted the posture of being very forthright. I said we are briefing the interested people and keeping them informed, and the President immediately said this was the right thing to do and that he was glad we were handling it this way. He asked what I thought we should do, and I replied I thought we should continue our forthright public posture and also continue to carry out the tests that are needed and not lose our nerve. I said these tests were necessary in order to develop the ABM. It was as simple as that. I told him we were developing another test site in central Nevada and also one in Amchitka in the Aleutian Islands. He smiled and indicated by a gesture that that didn't seem to be the best place in the world for testing, but I indicated we had made a real search for sites and this was the best we could find, and if anyone in the room could come up with a better suggestion, we would be very surprised.

I then went on to describe the situation with respect to the proposed shutdown of two reactors at Hanford. I said that this was contemplated in the Johnson budget; as a result of the interjections of Senator Jackson, however, President Johnson had agreed that the AEC might defer action in starting the shutdowns until President Nixon had an opportunity to review the situation. The President indicated in a somewhat light way that this meant it has been thrown into his lap, which, I conceded, is the case. I said there is a genuine difference of opinion about how much plutonium is needed, that there are some who think that the continued production of these two Hanford reactors is required. I said that, in any case, due to the economic impact on the Hanford area, it might be better to have a more orderly slowdown in production and not shut down these two reactors until we have found some compensating factors. I mentioned that five out of nine reactors have been shut down at Hanford in the past four years.

Somebody raised the question whether I should see the press; although I indicated it would probably be best if I left in low key without doing this, the President immediately suggested that he would prefer that I meet with the press--that he was making such meetings a part of his mode of operation. He suggested I might indicate that he had asked me to stay on as Chairman, that we had discussed a number of items, especially the peaceful uses of atomic energy. He suggested I indicate his interest in this field, mentioning especially the

Plowshare program and the Australian harbor experiment and the power program, such as the breeder reactors. He also suggested I mention that he was going to visit the AEC at Germantown soon in order to be briefed further about the AEC's program.

As the meeting broke up, the President suggested that a photographer come in to take some pictures for the historical record, which was done (see picture below). The President and I recalled our meeting long ago--in January, 1948--at Chattanooga, when we were both in the group of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of 1947, chosen by the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce. I said I had a photograph of us in that context and asked whether he would autograph it, and he said he would be glad to do so. I also said I had a picture of him with my kids, taken in June, 1960, and he indicated very cordially that he would be glad to autograph this also.

After my appointment with the President, Ellsworth took me to the Press Room, where we met Ron Ziegler. We waited for a few minutes outside while Interior Secretary Walter Hickel was finishing his press conference; when he came out, I met him. Ziegler then took me to the packed Press Room to a microphone.

I began by saying that I had just finished meeting with the President and that the President has asked me to tell the press about our conversation. I said we had talked about some national security matters and then had gone on to discuss the AEC's program for the peaceful uses of atomic energy. I said the President had expressed a great interest in this program and that he had especially singled out Plowshare and the power reactor breeder program. I said he has asked that these programs receive adequate attention and be accelerated by the AEC. I said he had mentioned a special interest in the use of nuclear explosives for the building of a harbor in Australia. I also said that the President indicated he intended to visit the AEC in its Germantown

[Omitted here is a photograph.]

Headquarters sometime in February to receive a more thorough briefing on the AEC's program (transcript attached).

My initial statement was followed by questions. A number of these concerned the Australian project. I described the nature of the project. I said that the cost might be, very roughly, \$10 million, although this is rather vague and could be interpreted as being in the broader context of a larger program. I did indicate that the U.S. share might be that of furnishing the explosives and their emplacement, and perhaps something more, roughly equivalent to the cost of an experiment that would otherwise be conducted in the U.S. I said that the Australian experiment would be the equivalent of such an other experiment and would be part of the program required in order to get the necessary information for the Inter-Oceanic Canal Study Commission for their report, which is due in 1970.

Continuing answering questions, I said I thought the Australian experiment could be conducted within the requirements of the test ban treaty. This question was asked twice.

In answer to a question I was asked, whether the President had asked me to continue as Chairman of the AEC, I indicated that he had. I was asked how long my term is, and I indicated that I voluntarily accepted a short term, which expires in June, 1970. I indicated that my term as Commissioner was determined by law, and that my designation as Chairman was a separate matter, done by the President.

Upon returning to the office, I presided at 4:45 p.m. at Information Meeting 871 (notes attached), where I reported on my meeting with President Nixon.

[Omitted here is Seaborg's diary entry for January 29.]